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ABSTRACT

Minority groups seeking self-determination have a need for and a right to participate in and contribute to a growing body knowledge of human development and human relationships generated by social science research that is not only scientific, hence "unbiased," but which does not perpetuate damaging stereotypes. It is the purpose of this paper to propose and describe a series of mutual rights and responsibilities of the minority community and the social researcher toward each other, and to discuss various difficulties in fulfilling such rights and responsibilities. Specific suggestions are delineated in charging Federal funding agencies with the responsibility of protecting and promoting the rights of both the minority group and the social researcher. A working model which is being used successfully in a minority (American Indian) community research and development project is described. Participatory decision-making, from the initial stages of a research project until its completion, is seen as the key to minority group utilization of social science research in society today, with such participation being facilitated by specific styles of research which are discussed. (Author)

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SOCIAL RESEARCH WITH MINORITIES:

SOME RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES*

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Minority groups seeking self-determination of their affairs and the attainment of greater dignity, freedom of choice and full rights as human beings, may feel the need for and demand the right to share in the growing body of knowledge of human development and human relationships generated by social science research. However, with a historical perspective of pervasive prejudice and discrimination directed toward ethnic minorities in our society, there is, as Sue and Sue (1972) describe, the tendency for minority peoples to view organized social science as a part of the "Establishment". As a result, researchers in social science disciplines are perceived as inadvertantly or consciously contributing to and maintaining the status quo and continued power of the "Establishment". The person collecting and reporting data is often perceived as possessing the social bias of his particular segment of society. Indeed, Reiss (1970) describes the proclivity for the values held by policy-makers in our society to influence sociologists' formulation of research problems. With a note of irony, he points out that because of the values undergirding policies in society, "No sociologist, for example, properly investigated how best to maintain a system of racial segregation. Interestingly, no one seemed concerned with how best to foster racial intermarriage even before black was beautiful." (p.289). Deloria (1969) charges anthropologists with perpetrating a parasitic relationship with Indian peoples, a relationship of benefit to the professional, but which has often had a detrimental effect

on the Indian community and culture. Billingsley (1970) notes that "white social science" has tended to concentrate on the pathological and unstable black families instead of stable ones, and that this focus has led to distorted perceptions of blacks and reinforced a negative view of their family life. Vaca (1970) discusses similar instances of social science research bias against Mexican-American peoples and their cultural traditions. Suspicion of the motives of researchers and resistance to cooperating in their research is perhaps then, a most understandable and logical consequence of the minority experience.

In the interest of facilitating an improved relationship between minority groups and social science researchers, it is the purpose of this paper to propose and describe a series of mutual rights and responsibilities of the minority community and the researcher toward each other, to discuss various difficulties in fulfilling such rights and responsibilities, and to describe a working model which is being used in a minority community research project.

Styles of Research:

It is the position of many social science professionals that the most appropriate style of research lies in the assumption of a natural science model of value-free experimentation with theory which is carefully designed and controlled so as to permit exact replication. The demands of this model of "basic" research, as it may be termed, require a carefully detached researcher who becomes a laboratory specialist testing abstract, theoretical ideas rather than dealing with real human conditions. MacRae (1971) develops the point that while basic research has an important role to play in the

advancement of sociological theory, many researchers in the social sciences take the position that a less detached style of research, with a frankly participatory role is appropriate for the researcher as a valuing, communicating human being. The issue of the social scientist's professional relation to social action has long been discussed within the disciplines. Many years ago, sociologist Louis Wirth defined action research as "research that is intimately tied to changing the social order rather than to a theoretical formulation about what the order is like" (Reiss, 1964, p. xi), and this definition continues to be applicable today. If, however, professionals who commit themselves to involvement in action research are to conduct research of the highest quality, certain responsibilities to the discipline, described by Short (1967), must be met. They are as follows: the researcher is responsible for maintaining a scientific perspective, for utilizing a carefully formulated theoretical basis for his observations, and for contributing to the body of knowledge fundamental to the discipline.

Minority groups have long been an "objet d'interest" to social science researchers. And minority groups, particularly those with an emphasis on self-determination such as the American Indian, are in serious need of the application and testing of basic theory through action research. Their needs for community development and institution-building as well as improved capacity for human development are well within the scope of the action-researcher, particularly those researchers who are able to work in an interdisciplinary team.

But, have social science researchers considered the question, "What are the rights of the minority group that is being researched?" Unfortunately,

the answer, all too often, is "no." Particularly in terms of basic research, the "researched" has had little or no voice in determining who is studied; how the study is conducted; who is funded to do the study; or to whom and how the results of the study are disseminated. The question of whether the people being studied have a right to expect some positive, practical return for their cooperation has seldom been raised. Basic researchers may even feel these considerations to be inappropriate to the scientific model. Sudia (1971) describes the powerlessness of the American Indians, in particular, who have long been the subject of more search than service. She cites the example of Indians on a South Dakota reservation who, in one year, were subjected to some sixty-three research and demonstration projects. Because Indian people did not participate in the decision-making involved in these projects, the possibilities for any of the projects to make a definable contribution to the Indian community were greatly diminished.

The style of action research described by Etzioni (1971) as "policy research" not only provides what he terms "a legitimate opportunity for scholars to do 'relevant' research," but it embodies the principles of responsibility described above by Short (1967), as well as, seeks to aid the solution of fundamental social problems and in the advancement of major social programs. This style of research is potentially highly useful to minority populations in that it deals with values and seeks to clarify goals. Policy researchers are basically concerned with social units and with mapping alternative approaches to the problems in which those units are involved, as well as with specifying potential differences in the intention, effect and cost of various amelioriative programs. This style of research probes issues, not in terms of the personal values of the researchers but in terms of the needs and values of the individuals constituting the involved social unit.

The researcher of ethnic matters today will be challenged, repeatedly and in depth, concerning his attitudes and values towards minority groups and their rights, and some types of research projects may be entirely blocked by minority people if they perceive that it does not have relevance or worth to the persons or community studied, or if community leaders have no participation in decisions relative to the project (Goering and Cummins, 1970). Sudia (1971) reports on a conference of minority persons held in Chicago in the spring of 1971. Some of the conference participants pointed out that "research that compares racial groups can be very damaging as long as this country is a racist society." They recommended: (a) that researchers should proceed very cautiously in that respect; (b) that the potential misuse of a project be considered; and (c) that the value of a project's "scientific contribution" must be carefully weighed against the possibility of potential harmful effects on the participating population. Indeed, many minority groups currently feel that, not only is it the researcher's responsibility to consider these issues, it is the right of the participating minority group to share in this decision-making. A clear trend is developing within minority groups whereby "basic" research is being rejected. Action-research may be acceptable if the above-mentioned recommendations are observed, and if the researcher is found, by the minority group, to be committed to participatory action-research, with such rights and responsibilities as are described below.

It must be recognized that this is a style of research fraught with time-consuming necessities not required of the "basic" researcher. An example of the frustrations and blockages that may occur when a minority group is not involved in a participatory decision-making role is cited by Sudia (1971).

A Black community in the Boston area refused to allow a $2 million research and demonstration project to be carried out because members of the community had not been involved in the planning for the project and community spokesmen questioned the worth of the research to the people being studied or to the community as a whole. Sudia reports that the reactions of "establishment" people ranged "from anger and frustration to acceptance and approval." Apparently the task of explaining and justifying research to a defensive minority community seems challenging to some social researchers and appalling or impossible to others (Sudia, 1971, p. 156).

Profile of the Action Researcher:

It has been said that the psychic profile of a successful action researcher is quite different from that of a basic researcher. The task of communicating with the members of the social unit under analysis cannot be delegated entirely to subordinates. It is not only useful, but necessary that the researcher himself have direct contact with the constituency itself. This contact clarifies, in his mind, the constraints those individuals face, must live with, and must learn how to overcome.

The action researcher must be able to interact effectively with minority leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, blue-collar workers, housewives, youths, and professionals in other disciplines. He must be willing to invest a significant amount of time and energy in communicating; in learning how the world appears to the constituents of the involved social unit. He must be able to translate from the level of abstraction at which he conceptualizes the problem, to the verbal and cognitive level of the constituency. He must expect some resistance to his conclusions, on the part of the constituency. Such resistance may stem from

emotional reaction to the research results; from a cognitive deficit due to lack of information; or from self-interest, either due to a desire to maintain the status-quo, or because the results and recommended policies may serve some segments of the constituency less well than others.

Typically, policy issues investigated by action research cannot be effectively dealt with by one discipline alone. Therefore, examination of the problems relevant to the social unit under analysis may require interdisciplinary cooperation, i.e. with psychologists, educationists, environmentalists, public health specialists, engineers, architects, etc. Funding agencies are now persuaded that interdisciplinary cooperation is a necessity for applied and policy research, and are giving priority to such endeavors (Socio-log, November, 1971). Again, we see the need for the policy researcher to have the ability and willingness to interact, cooperate and communicate with a body of individuals outside of his profession. If the varied members of a team can provide careful interdisciplinary analysis of the problems of a social unit, the decisions and recommendations reached will be more comprehensive and effective as a result of the multi-professional effort.

Rights and Responsibilities:

Participatory decision making, from the initial stages of a research project until its completion, is perhaps the key to minority group utilization of social science research in society today. In order for this to occur, the researcher must be committed to action-research which can contribute to the concerns and betterment of the groups being studied. The minority group, which may be termed the client, must understand the limitations of such research as well as its potential value in effective social problem solving. Goals of

research and evaluation of its success are defined by minority people primarily in their terms, and the researcher's goals must be congruent with those terms in order for cooperation to be achieved and valid data to be obtained.

In order for the client-researcher relationship to be productive, the "rights" of a minority population, the "rights" of researchers, and the "responsibilities" of each toward the other, must be clarified at the outset and maintained throughout the duration of the working relationship.

An interesting, crucial function of the client-researcher relationship is that it is the responsibility of one party to uphold the rights of the other, and vice versa. For example, the minority group which is to be researched has a right to participate in the definition of the problem, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to see that the right is fulfilled. The researcher can carry out that responsibility by developing a working relationship with a "gate-keeper organization" within the group, by listening carefully to their expressions of the problem and, in turn, defining the problem in researchable terms which meet the goals of the client.

The researcher has the responsibility for collecting valid, reliable data. The client has the right to participate in many aspects of the data collection. In the process of training indigenous persons in data collection skills, the researcher gains a unique opportunity to gain, from them, insight into the values, customs, and attitudes of the population under consideration and by utilizing this input, data collection, i.e. structure of questionnaires, styles of interviewing, etc., can be more skillfully developed so as to maximize validity of responses. Also, of continuing benefit to the community, are the skills which have been developed in local people.

Because the researcher is charged with maintaining the scientific merit of research through objective observation, he has the right to develop, free of client control or manipulation, the research design and methods of its implementation. It is the responsibility of the client to communicate openly their questions in regard to principles of research, and then to trust to the professional skill of the researcher, the task of developing results as bias-free as possible.

The "protection of human subjects", including the maintenance of confidentiality, is an important right of the client group. This protection is an important responsibility of the researcher, although it is possible in some cases for this to also be a cooperative effort, if the client is interested in the formation of a local Human Subjects Review Board, as discussed below.

The client has a right to a clear presentation of the research results and it is the responsibility of the researcher to report to the minority group in language, written or verbal, that is free of unnecessary professional jargon and meaningful to the minority audience. The reporting must contain an objective, accurate analysis of the results and, while the researcher may take the responsibility for suggesting varied alternatives by which the data may be utilized in social-problem-solving, the decision-making opportunities are the right of the minority group.

A Working Model:

The opportunity for staff members of the Social Research Center to begin focusing on American Indian policy research was initiated by tribal members. Over the past three years we have established several basic principles and have formulated a flexible working model. The components for this model, a variation of one postulated by Lazarsfeld, Sewell and Wilensky (1967), include the following:

1. We respond to requests for social-psychological research assistance from such official tribal organizations as the tribal councils, which we view and utilize as "gatekeeper organizations" (Richardson, Dohrenwend, and Klein, 1965). We do not initiate research action, and we feel that a cooperative working relationship with the tribal council is of increasingly significant importance to the success of social science research with Indian people.

2. When a request is made, it is usually formulated as a "problem". Our first task -- a joint discussion process with tribal Council members -- is to expose all facets of this "problem". Many times, what has been verbalized is a "symptom" and the "problem" needs clarification before it can be defined in a researchable way.

3. We advise the tribal council members of our capabilities--tools and techniques--as researchers. If the "problem" is within our range of capabilities, we indicate that we could pursue the formulation of a research project if they so desire. If the problem is not within our range of capabilities, we refer them to appropriate resources.

4. If they so request, we provide assistance in the formulation of a proposal to obtain funding, and we act as resources in suggesting various appropriate funding agencies.

5. We request that the primary funding be done through the tribe, which then may subcontract the research to those in whom they have trust as researchers.

6. We feel strongly that building trust between this social unit and the research staff is an integral part of this action research process. Communication resulting in mutual understanding and the building and testing of

interpersonal relationships over time, are necessary components of the trust-building process.

A project in which we are currently engaged involves a multivariate analysis of the adolescent Indian youth's academic performance, including success in high school achievement as well as dropping out of the educational system altogether. There are two concurrent components to this project. The research component involves reservation Indian people in assisting with building and pre-testing instruments; data collection, i.e. interviewing, observation; and assistance in data analysis. This involvement requires a great deal of on-the-job training by the researchers, and results in the participants gaining skills previously unavailable to the reservation setting.

The second component of the project is a community development program which involves training selected community residents as community developers. It is the goal of this program to develop grass-roots support of the research effort and, ultimately, to so raise the level of interest in and awareness of the educational systems that community residents become involved in areas such as school policy decision making, parent-teacher relationships, etc.

Our model, which describes the patterns of interaction as the community developers begin to work with community residents, is similar in approach to a model developed by Scheinfeld, et al. (1970) The following principles will guide the community developers as they work within the reservation communities.

They will:

(1) Go to individuals and families in the community, rather than expecting them to come to organized meetings.

(2) Discover community residents' own feelings and ideas concerning the scope of problems they face in coping with social and educational systems,

rather than superimposing values and beliefs from outside agents.

(3) Introduce concrete activities through which patterns of community members interaction can be developed to focus on the perceived problems and through which new concepts for coping with social and educational systems can be introduced.

(4) Work with community members together, beginning in small groups, i.e., families or household units, in order that ideas can be shared and actions mutually supported or reinforced.

(5) Work with as many community members as possible, anyone willing to participate, in order to develop the broadest and possible base for planning and decision-making.

(6) Give positive reinforcement to group participants in the style with which they tend to reinforce each other. This provides a model for reinforcing interaction and should lead to each member having the chance to be viewed as an effective teacher and learner.

(7) Work with the network of social relationships that already exist between community members. This, in Scheinfeld's terms, "will broaden the effect of the program, strengthen preexisting ties, and create a new community of interests and mutual support. Such a strategy is suggested as an alternative to the usual method of attempting to establish new relationships of cooperation, communication, and trust among people who are virtual strangers to one another in a community characterized by an unusually high level of suspicion and mistrust." (Scheinfeld, et al., 1970, p. 415)

We are committed to participatory decision-making between client and researcher in social research, even though there are risks and frustations not

present to other styles of research, because it allows the researcher much greater insight with which to carry out his observations, and because the results have greater potential for being directly useful to the client, as well as contributing to general social science knowledge.

Some Impediments Inherent in Action Research:

There are, however, a number of impediments to this style of research which make it very difficult to achieve. First, developing a relationship of mutual trust and respect between a minority community and a team of researchers requires an extended period of time. Professionals involved in teaching, as well as research, rarely have sufficient time available. Secondly, there must be sufficient funding available to support the researchers and meet their expenses over this time period. Planning grants for this type of activity are almost non-existent, so whatever personal or institutional resources are currently available to the researcher must be maximized. Thirdly, while the researcher must develop his working relationship with a "gatekeeper organization", he remains vulnerable to the shifting power structures of minority communities. If the group with whom the relationship has been developed is overtaken by another power bloc in internal power struggles, a completely new set of relationships may have to evolve between the researcher and the new power bloc, as well as between the researcher and the former "gatekeeper". Probably the soundest advice which can be given is for researchers to work in small teams, because the frustration level of this style of research can be very high and if several researchers are working together the chances of them all becoming completely discouraged at the same time are diminished. Hopefully, at the various times there will always be at least one who can feel optimistic that the crisis will pass and encourage the others to persist.

Federal Responsibilities in Minority Research:

Federal funding agencies hold considerable power over social research in the United States, and thus have a serious responsibility to protect and promote the rights of both the minority group and the social researcher. There are several specific ways in which this responsibility may be carried out. First, each funding agency must have minority participation in its internal decision-making processes. Setting up special Minority Studies sections is only part of the answer. These sections may be relegated very limited funding capabilities, and if a process begins whereby all minority proposals are channeled to that one section, simply because they are minority-related, minority peoples may again be deprived of much-needed resources. In addition to Minority Studies sections, there should be sufficient minority representation on every review board to insure that their voices can be heard. Secondly, funding agencies must maintain sufficiently stringent criteria directed toward the highest quality of social research in order that funds are granted for projects which provide the greatest potential for contributing to minority development. Thirdly, site visitors must be selected from professionals of minority groups. In addition to their general purpose of obtaining an overview of a research situation, they should develop the capability whereby they are able, not only to observe the client-researcher relationship, but to provide input as to how roles may be structured in order to carry out the responsibilities of a participatory relationship. They need to clarify for both the client and the researcher the rights of each. Minority professionals as site visitors can be a valuable resource as they can interpret the norms of a professional researcher to the client and provide the researcher with additional insight into the values and attitudes of minority

peoples. This educative function should equal in importance their evaluative function as site visitors. A fourth way in which the federal government may function responsibly toward social research with minority peoples evolves logically from an already-existing mechanism; namely, the required Human Subjects Review Board, which is charged with local vigilance over the protection of human subjects in any given research project. Now, as in the past, these boards are required of each professional institution involved in human research, with stringent requirements being met before federal certification of each board is granted. Once established, the local board reviews all projects emanating from the institution. In recent years there have been specific cases of local minority groups, in particular Indian tribes, who applied for research funds and expressed the desire to create and have certified their own human subjects review board. It has been but a few years since they were told that this could not be done, and that their project must affiliate itself with the review board of a nearby university. More recently, however, policies seem to be changing and instances have occurred whereby Indian tribes have been able to create and utilize their own review board. In some cases, the tribal board may work in partnership with the institution sponsoring the research. This relationship not only provides a resource for developing this experience within a minority group, but it is another strong element in client-researcher participatory decision-making.

Conclusion:

As a final note, one must deal with the challenge that minority researchers ought to conduct minority research. Apparently Blacks have enough trained

people and enough resources to conduct the research necessary for blacks (Federal Interagency Committee on Education, 1971), but it is a reality that minorities such as Chicanos and Indians do not have that resource within their population (Sudia, 1971). One of the goals of Indian education is to so train their people, but until there is an adequate supply of Indian researchers, the work must be carried on by non-Indians. Sue and Sue (1972) point out, however, that "even belonging to a racial minority is no longer adequate credentials for conducting research on minorities. A minority professional in attempting to build a professional reputation and seeking acceptance by his colleagues, may incur the wrath of his own social group. He is oftentimes seen as having sold out to the other side."

In our present situation, though, as many indigenous persons as possible are utilized as staff on our research projects. One of our goals is to so train these Indians in such para-professional skills as proposal-writing, interviewing, research project coordination and administration, that they will be able to function in similar capacities in permanent positions created by the institution-building process and the community developed engendered by the policy decisions resulting from the research recommendations.

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